

Transnational Feminist Rhetorics and Gendered Leadership in Global Politics: From Daughters of Destiny to Iron Ladies (Cultural Studies/Pedagogy/Activism)

Rebecca S. Richards

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Transnational Feminist Rhetorics and Gendered Leadership in Global Politics examines the rhetoric surrounding women who hold or have held the highest office of a nation-state. Heads of state, such as Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher, Benazir Bhutto, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Michelle Bachelet, have navigated their ascent to executive government in vastly different ways while contending with gendered expectations of leadership, especially since most of them are the first woman to occupy their country's highest governmental position. This book analyzes how these women rhetorically perform their positions of power—discursively, visually, and physically—in a traditionally male leadership role. Specifically, this project examines how certain rhetorical acts open up and close down the potential to confront the gendered expectations surrounding political leadership.

When people analyze, campaign for, or critique a "female prime minister" or a "woman president," they are not just talking about one woman but also referencing a collective neoliberal logic that interrupts and reaffirms the belief that the nation-state is an eternal, inevitable structure. Diverse political figures, such as Angela Merkel, Julia Gillard, and Indira Gandhi, are continually put in conversation with one another, through popular media representations, academic scholarship, and political analyses. This book examines the effect of such comparisons and connections, ultimately arguing that many of these gestures reduce or oversimplify women's contributions to world politics. In order to show this effect, this book manifests the transnational connections found in autobiographies, organizations, political commentaries, biographical films, and other sources that focus on women who have been heads of state.



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